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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

THE QUESTION OF TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement,
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31.

[16 June 1999]

The activities of transnational oil corporations in Africa

1. The transnational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are confronted with a complex political and economic situation. Serious human rights violations by the Nigerian security forces, especially in the Niger Delta, have been reported by different human rights organizations in the last years. Transnational corporations operating under these circumstances have a special obligation to genuinely respect for human rights and not to become complicit in abuses by the security forces in order to guarantee the full operation of their oil production facilities. Regarding the enormous economic importance of oil revenue in the Nigerian economy, the behaviour of the transnational oil corporations has a serious impact on the decision making of the Nigerian authorities.
2. The misuse of the oil wealth by Nigerian politicians has generated much frustration among the ethnic minorities living in the Niger Delta. The latest outbreak of this frustration resulted in a massive loss of lives and property in the Warri (Delta state) Area. Up to 300 people died in ethnic clashes between the communities of the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo in May and June 1999. Anger at inequities attributed to the oil production has been one of the causes of the latest clashes in Warri. The people are poor in the midst of abundant resources. The few big industries have shut down and important jobs in the oil industry are not available for local people. No significant measures have been taken by the Nigerian authorities to improve the development of the area.
3. The Government reacts by sending armed squads every time there is a flare-up, in order to guarantee the oil production and to protect the interests of the transnational corporations. Several transnational oil corporations are involved in human rights abuses committed by Nigerian security forces. During an attack on the Opi and Ikempan communities (Delta state) on 4 January 1999 soldiers burnt Chevron boats and helicopters. Many houses were burnt down and at least four people died in the incident. Numerous cases are documented in which soldiers committed human rights violations against locals of the indigenous communities in the Niger Delta who were involved in protests over the activities of transnational oil corporations. Sometimes the violations have been committed after the companies requested the intervention of the security forces. Transnational corporations have a legitimate need to safeguard their facilities, but they become complicit in human rights violations if they do not intervene in cases of human rights violations by the security forces guaranteeing their oil production. The Society for Threatened Peoples urges the Sub-Commission to request that transnational corporations should develop procedures to guarantee that their activities do not result in human rights violations. In the case that human rights violations are committed, they should call on the authorities to stop the abuses immediately, to hold the perpetrators responsible and to compensate the victims. They should publish their security agreements with the authorities and private companies. A broader participation of the local communities who will be affected by the activities of the transnational corporations in the planning of the investments of multinational companies is essential to ensure that the projects have the consent of those who might suffer their consequences.